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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to decrease the number of at-risk high school students who were being transferred to alternative school sites because of disruptive behavior. One strategy implemented for this project involved having the program participants stay in one class all day while the teachers came into the classroom to teach their particular subject area. The second phase of the program involved 15 former student mentors who were attending the local community college. Each mentor was assigned a student and scheduled to meet at least 5 hours a week with the student. Weekly individual and group counseling were provided to the at-risk students. Parents of the students were contacted by telephone to discuss their child's progress during weekly counseling sessions and were also offered evening hours to meet with the counselor. The program resulted in a significant decrease in the number of students transferred to alternative placements. The objectives of the program focused on addressing the needs of the students rather than on punitive aspects of their behavior. Students improved behavior and academic performance in the classroom. Only a small percentage of the students were transferred. The mentoring component of the program appeared to be directly responsible for a considerable degree of the success of the program. (Author/NB)

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ED 366 858

Decreasing Alternative Placement for At-Risk Students at the Secondary Level

by

Paul J. Everett

Cluster 38

A Practicum I Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1991

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This practicum report was submitted by Paul J. Everett under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

6-25-91
Date of Final Approval of report

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I reflect on the beginning stages of this practicum, I am reminded of the vast amount of work required that made this project possible. My first reaction is "how did I ever manage to get all of this done?" Then I quickly remember who enabled me to "cut through the red tape". Therefore, a special thanks is given to Mr. Fred Damianos, the principal of my school. Mr. Damianos approached his first year here at the school with a vision that is indicative and reflective of what all modern educators today should follow.

Gratitude is also extended to the mentors who volunteered their time because they cared about the welfare of children growing up in very difficult times. It was encouraging to see the enthusiasm displayed by the mentors as they realized the value of their presence.

Thanks of course to my colleagues at work who made themselves available and offered their assistance if needed. Without your patience and suggestions this project would not have experienced the success that it did. Included in this thanks are the school monitors who were my "eyes and ears" and kept me abreast of potential problems.

And finally a very special thanks to my dear friend Flora whose guidance and encouragement enabled me to "tie up all the loose ends."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS..... iv

LIST OF TABLES..... v

ABSTRACT..... vi

Chapter

I INTRODUCTION..... 1

Description of Work Setting and Community..... 1
Writer's Work Setting and Role..... 3

II STUDY OF THE PROBLEM..... 6

Problem Description..... 6
Problem Documentation..... 7
Causative Analysis..... 8
Relationship of the Problem to the Literature..... 9

III ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS..... 13

Goals and Expectations..... 13
Behavioral Objectives..... 13
Measurement of Objectives..... 14

IV SOLUTION STRATEGY..... 15

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions..... 15
Description of Selected Solution..... 21
Report of Action Taken..... 23

V RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... 32

Results..... 32
Discussion..... 35
Recommendations..... 39
Dissemination..... 39

REFERENCES..... 41

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Appendices

A SAMPLE PROFILE.....43

B WEEKLY PROGRESS REPORT.....45

C LIST OF VIDEOS.....47

D MENTEE PARENT LETTER.....49

E MENTEE/MENTOR GOAL PLANNING SHEET.....51

F PARENT PERMISSION FORM.....53

G MENTEE COMMITMENT FORM.....55

H WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT.....57

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1 Data on Mentees in Target Population.....34

2 Grade Comparison in English and Mathematics..35

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ABSTRACT

Decreasing Alternative Placement for At-Risk Students at the Secondary Level. Everett, Paul J., 1991: Practicum I Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Descriptors: Change Strategies/Cooperation /Discipline Problems/Elementary Secondary Education/ Intervention/Student Behavior/Theory Practice Relationship/ Urban Schools/

The objective of this practicum was to decrease the number of at risk students that were being transfered to alternative sites for disruptive behavior. The strategies that were implemented for this project were twofold. The first began with conducting a school within a school. This involved having the program participants stay in one class all day while the teachers of each subject area come into the classroom to teach their particular subject area. The second phase of the program included 15 mentors that were former students of the school that were attending the local community college. Each mentor was assigned a student, scheduling themselves to meet at least five hours a week with the student.

In addition to the small classroom instruction and mentoring relationships, the writer provided weekly individual and group counseling. A significant amount of attention was provided to the students between the teachers, mentors and the writer. The writer made accomodations for parents by scheduling evening office hours. Additionally the writer made frequent phone contact with the parent to inform parents of their child's progress during weekly counseling sessions.

The writer realized a significant decrease in the number of students transfered to alternative placement. The objectives of the program focused on addressing the needs of the at-risk student as opposed to focusing on the punitive aspects of the behavior. Students improved behavior and academic performance in the classroom. Only a small percentage of the students were transferred who participated in the program. The mentoring component of the program appeared to be directly responsible for a considerable degree of the success of the program.

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June 16, 1991

Paul J. Everett

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

The work setting was a senior high school that was located in a suburban community in the southeastern part of the United States. Over the past 10 years, the community had experienced a complete ethnic turnaround. The student enrollment was approximately 2,500, 92% were Black, 4% Hispanic, 3% White and 1% other. The school housed ninth through twelfth grades. It was the parent school of 11 feeder schools that included 3 middle schools and 8 elementary schools.

The socioeconomic status of the community was middle to upper class. More than half of the households had incomes of $30,000 and up. Single parent family homes were also prevalent in the area. The community was known for its high number of Caribbean residents. It was not atypical to find many students residing with relatives other than parents. These students had been sent to take advantage of an American education.

The school site was located within the realm of many local businesses. Therefore, there were close ties between the school and the business community. These businesses offered many scholarships and various awards to students. It was a common practice for students who sought work to gain employment with several of the local businesses.

The school was under the leadership of a new principal this year. The principal came from one of the local middle schools that fed into the high school. Three assistant principals were still intact. An average of 25 years of experience was shared among the assistant principals.

The school had a reputation of academic excellence. The school had been recognized as a meritorious school for three of the last five years. Approximately 250 course offerings were provided in the school's curriculum. Parental involvement was evident. Their support tended to demand that the curriculum geared itself toward college preparatory courses. Extensive articulation workshops with the feeder schools ensured the continued academic needs of the students that lived in the community. Courses such as debate, speech, and world geography were not required by the local district. However, those courses were certainly an integral part of the curriculum. The school had realized a moderate growth in the number of advanced placement courses as well as the number of students taking those courses. Students scored well on college entrance examinations with 49 percent scoring a 3 or better on the advanced placement examinations. A 5 is the highest score possible on these examinations. The State Student Assessment Test (SSAT) and Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) scores had, likewise, continued their steady rise during the last five years.

Over the past five years, the school had also experienced a significant increase in students in its Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program. The ESE program offered academic and vocational courses to meet the individualized educational needs of all students with the help of the ESE staff. The ESE staff assessed students periodically to assure the program criteria were being met. The instructional activities used assisted students in reaching their full potential in all academic and social competencies.

One of the reasons for the academic successes of the school had been an experienced faculty that took pride in "grooming" beginning teachers. The school faculty was in compliance with a federal desegregation order; 75% of the staff was White and 25% Black. The school's faculty numbered 197; this included paraprofessionals and clerical staff.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer had been a guidance counselor at the worksite for six years. However, as a result of a recent retirement, the writer was promoted as Student Services Chairperson. Being Student Services Chairperson required that the writer oversee four grade level counselors, a group counselor, a Center for Special Instruction (CSI) instructor, a College Assistance Program (CAP) counselor, a Trust counselor (substance abuse) and an occupational/placement specialist.

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Other responsibilities included supervising activities of the guidance staff and assisting with curriculum planning and subject selection.

The objectives of the student services department were two-fold. The department sought to encourage and motivate students to accept responsibility for their lives. Student services personnel guided students so they became productive citizens of society. The department was expected to: provide accurate information pertaining to the correct sequence of courses and graduation requirements, advise in the matters of conflict resolution strategies, self-esteem enhancement techniques, interpersonal relationship skills, drug education and referral and other relevant topics. The facilitation of clear communication between students, teachers and parents was the responsibility of the writer. Another major responsibility of the Student Services Chairperson was participation on various committees.

During the implementation of this practicum, the writer was responsible for developing intervention strategies for 15 male students, grades ninth through twelfth. The intervention strategies were being used as an alternative to external placement. Consequently these strategies were to reduce the considerably high number of at-risk students (approximately 269) that were administratively referred to alternative educational programs. Out of the 269 referrals 31 of those were for external-alternative placement.

The procedure for administrative referrals began with an automatic 10 day suspension of the student who had committed a serious conduct code violation. During the suspension, the referral for alternative school placement was processed so that the student could be placed in an external-alternative school site. Depending on the seriousness of the violation the student was placed in an indoor suspension program while the referral was reviewed by the region office. A referral could have been approved, denied, or the student may have been placed on "in-school probation" pending review.

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CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The number of at-risk students placed in alternative schools needed to be decreased. At-risk students often possessed a negative perception of school. A mandatory assignment to an alternative school only compounded that perception. According to the National School Boards Association (NSBA, 1989),

> At-risk children and youth are those who are subject to environmental, familial, or societal forces over which they have no control and which adversely affect their ability to learn in school and survive in society. As a result, at-risk children and youth have uncertain futures as students, workers, and citizens and ultimately are unlikely to become productive members of society (p. 6).

Students who were referred for alternative placement from the writer's worksite met at least one or several elements of the at-risk criteria. According to the student referral report those at-risk students were disproportionately being referred to alternative educational settings at an excessive rate. Consequently the number of students who were transferred to alternative schools at the writer's worksite needed to decrease.

Black males accounted for over 70% of the students referred for alternative school placement at the writer's worksite. Specifically, the reason for their referrals had been for disruptive behavior to the degree that it warranted a swift administrative response for their actions.

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As mentioned earlier the referral process for students whose behavior warranted possible alternative placement began with documentation of the behavior and case management profiles of the student being reviewed by administration. If the behavior was serious enough to request for alternative placement, a referral was submitted to the region office for review and approval. This process normally took two weeks. The writer worked exclusively with those students whose referrals had been submitted for review and attempted to decrease the likelihood of placement.

Problem Documentation

The writer's school had been identified as one of three schools in the district that exceeded the average for referring students to alternative placement. This information was obtained through the student referral report that was documented annually to inform schools district-wide of their student case management profiles. The student referral report for the 89-90 school year indicated that the writer's school recommended 31 students for alternative school placement. Additionally, the student case management profile revealed that every student referred to alternative placement met one or more criteria for an at-risk student. A profile of some of the students in the target group is in Appendix A.

Causative Analysis

The NSBA provided a definition for at-risk students that suggested that schools should become more committed in finding a solution to serve the extensive needs of at-risk students. It is relatively easy to document possible causes but quite difficult to address them effectively. In reviewing the scope of this problem, a multitude of causes surfaced; but none were as prevalent as the following:

1. A negligence of the school to incorporate developmental or rehabilitative approach for at- risk students.

2. A failure on the part of student services to address the cause of inappropriate responses to school rules through counseling, academic assistance, and follow-up procedures.

3. The absence of a concerted effort on behalf of school personnel to avoid the use of alternative-school school placement as a first response to behavior problems that possibly could have been resolved by student services.

4. Lack of awareness on behalf of the faculty to adjust to the change of ethnicity experienced in the school and the community.

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Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Large metropolitan school systems share a number of problems because of the number of students enrolled. Many of these problems may differ to a degree. However, one common subject, of course, is discipline. Without a doubt, discipline continues to be a major detriment to learning in American education. Education experts relentlessly search for techniques to impact and improve discipline for the at-risk child. In most cases, an at-risk child has values that are going to be quite different from the traditional student.

Alternative placement may be known to many educational historians as reformatory school. In simple terms, reformatory school was specifically for non-traditional students or a more popular used term was delinquent children. Murphy (1974) reported that these reformatory schools or training institutions had very clear objectives. The goals were to simply discipline, instruct, employ, and govern until the child was either reformed or reached the age of 21.

Although this concept began as early as 1870, the stigma for children who are referred there today remains the same. Mann and Gold (1981) revealed that children develop low self-esteem because students believe placement at the alternative school is for "bad kids". Additionally, school personnel and parents share the same negative opinion about alternative programs and the students who are referred there.

Many educators agree that alternative placement of students already identified as at-risk will not be best served if they are not dealt with more effectively. Evidence indicates that if educators are sincere in wanting to help at-risk students, then educators must take earnest steps in convincing at-risk students that they belong in a traditional setting where formal education can take place. Deblois (1989) contended that at-risk students feel alienated from their school, and live up to their expected behavior because they cannot get along in their own schools.

Several opponents of alternative-school placement argued further that very little is accomplished as a result of the exclusion. Temporary relief for the teacher to work with students who show more desire to learn is welcomed. However, when the troubled student returns and finds himself not rehabilitated and farther behind academically, this only compounds an already critical situation. According to Patterson (1985), sometimes the way to deal with at-risk students is a unique combination of toughness and love. Assuring the student that a part of his education is learning that in order to belong to the school environment you must abide by the same rules as your peers may prove beneficial.

The current climate of many school systems that deal extensively with at-risk students is comparable to that of teachers and administration wanting to just remove the problem and take chances with the consequences later.

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Educational theorists today strongly suggest that educators revisit that attitude and emanate a more positive spirit. Schmidt (1989) purported that schools should empower at-risk students with the belief that there is hope and a realistic chance their futures of success are not out of reach. The author challenged schools, through their varied resources, to establish positive relationships and at the same time de-emphasize the punishment for inappropriate behavior. This approach should bring about the appropriate and more acceptable behavior that should allow the student to learn and the teachers to go about the business of teaching in the classrooms.

According to Neill (1976) many schools have become preoccupied with alternative-school placement being a temporary controlling technique with very little rehabilitation for the student taking place. This approach reminds the writer of soothing a baby's cry with milk. However, if the crying is the result of pain or discomfort of another kind, the milk only serves to be a very abbreviated relief. Likewise, if at-risk students are suffering from one of many impairments educators need to recognize that there is a problem and take appropriate measures to correct it. The issue, according to the Parents Union for Public Schools (1982), is how well schools across the nation respond and adapt to the demands of the at-risk child. The causes of behavior must be treated, not the symptoms.

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metropolitan areas hover around 48%, educational strategists strongly urge schools to become more creative in regard to disciplining at-risk students. Sullivan (1989) reported that administrators, teachers, and parents are more receptive to utilizing in-school alternative programs as a positive substitute to alternative placement outside of the school. Researchers have discovered that many schools are more successful than others with the same types of at-risk students. The difference in these successful schools has been effective management of the schools. Leadership in the school must allow for the latitude of staff to work innovatively with at-risk children to demonstrate their "multiple intelligences", according to Lee and Berman (1987).

The NSBA (1989) recommended that school boards and their communities become more sensitive to the needs of at-risk students by developing programs that encourage them to stay in school and engage in learning. Alternative-school placement should be used as a last resort. Deblois (1989) supported this recommendation and further suggested that these in-school programs focus on prevention, early intervention, late intervention, and recovery. Both of these educational strategists challenge the policy makers that control the funds for these badly needed programs to realize that this cannot be a reality without adequate funding.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The writer's goal was to implement a 12-week program that would reduce the number of students (15) who had been referred for placement in an alternative-school program. The plan was designed to better meet the needs of students who were experiencing difficulty in the regular school environment. The writer expected to decrease the number of placement of students who had been recommended for alternative-school placement approximately by 50%.

Behavioral Objectives

The behavioral objectives paralleled the writer's goals as stated above. Consequently, the objectives were detailed as follows:

1. At the conclusion of 12 weeks, there would be a decrease by at least 50% of the number of students placed in external sites by school personnel who worked with the target group.
2. At the conclusion of 12 weeks, there would be an improvement in grades of at least 7 of the 15 students in the target population by at least one letter grade in English and mathematics.

Members of the target group had been selected as a result of student profiles. These profiles contained each incident that had been identified as inappropriate.

Inappropriate behaviors seem to affect grades, too. The writer's regular review of grades and referral forms were used to measure the two objectives.

Measurement of Objectives

The number of students who were able to stay at the practicum site at the end of 12 weeks was used to determine the success of objective one. A comparison of grades received in English and mathematics measured the success of objective two.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

The problem was that there were 15 students who had been referred for placement in an alternative-school. The number of 15 needed to be decreased by at least 7 students. Numerous strategies to address the effectiveness of alternative-school placement had been documented and published for educators to utilize in their quest to meet the needs of non-traditional students. The writer was quite encouraged to find a plethora of literature that would enable successful execution of the practicum. However, a closer examination of the literature in regard to implementing effective strategies required the writer to be rather discrete before synthesizing a plan of action. The writer was fortunate to discover information provided by Gottfredson (1984) in regard to Program Development and Evaluation (PDE). In this information, Gottfredson revealed assumptions that must be adhered to in order for implementation and organizational change to be accepted by school personnel. The writer found it necessary to list these assumptions since the writer was engaged in implementing a program that required a degree of organizational change. The PDE listed the assumptions accordingly:

1. Methods guided by strategies that can be translated into action will be most productive.

2. Strategies will be implemented with most enthusiasm, and provide knowledge of school improvement if the theory on which the project is based is regarded as workable by project implementers and agrees with evidence from previous research and evaluation.

3. Effective implementation of an intervention is possible if blueprints for the intervention are available and if implementation is guided by data about the extent to which project strategies accord with the blueprint.

4. Effective adoption of an innovation is more likely when clear plans for adoption are available and when these plans are likely to overcome problems to organizational change.

5. Methods will become more effective in the presence of "evaluation pressure". Evaluation pressure takes many forms, some of which are pressure to focus on theory and to heed relevant information from previous research and assessment from current data about program strength and effectiveness.

6. Organizations that internalize these principles will be more effective and productive than those that simply comply with them.

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Gottfredson summarized these assumptions simply by stating that without the proper execution of these steps schools will continue to fail in their efforts to implement sound plans. Therefore, the writer found it necessary to employ these assumptions in principle to increase the odds of carrying out the implementation criteria of the practicum.

Educational researchers agree conclusively that one of the first steps in servicing students identified for alternative-school placement is providing positive school environments. The Missouri Model Guidance Program (MMGP, 1989) presented a study suggesting that in school-alternative programs may better serve the needs of at-risk students provided that the programs illuminated positive school environments.

The writer recognized that there was an apparent need for establishing better communication between student services personnel and administration. A review of the literature by Oregon School Study Council (OSSC, 1987) made it clear that communication was an important aspect acknowledging the needs of at-risk students. The OSSC strongly encouraged clear lines of communication among administrators, counselors, teachers, parents, and outside agencies providing services to students who are referred to alternative placement. A referral process that includes interviewing the student, providing for parent conferences, adequate counseling, and complete follow-up assures an effective and comprehensive

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in-school alternative program.

Mendez and Sanders (1981) advised school officials to be careful of haphazardly using in-school alternative placement as a holding area or better known as "dumping ground". This type of misuse allows for the immediate and sudden action of failure. The writer concurs with this notion as a result of having witnessed other programs not realize their intended use. Mizell (1977) explained that most in-school programs are created with sound foundations until the misuse of the programs defeats their operational intent.

In reviewing the literature, the writer was made aware that certain strategies may be successful for one school but not for others. According to the OSSC, it is imperative that school officials be knowledgeable of their communities as well as their student populations in order to assure the success of in-school alternative programs. This initiative should be an effort undertaken by every participant involved with the everyday operations of the school. This type of organizational change, however, begins with the principal; who, in most cases, will have to answer to various authorities if the program fails to operate satisfactorily. The program had to be accepted by faculty and students from a perspective that this type of program was for the benefit of the school and not just a place to detain unruly students.

Sullivan (1989) reported that when alternative programs

fail to include rehabilitative potential in the form of extensive individualized counseling by student services personnel it is destined to be short-lived. It is essential that personnel in charge of programs of this nature make every effort to have a clear vision of its rehabilitative purpose to best meet the needs of at-risk students. Sullivan's philosophy and goals concerning implementing a successful in-school alternative program suggested the following strategies beginning with:

1. incorporating a developmental process that assumes misbehavior is a symptom of an underlying problem that must be identified or resolved,

2. addressing the causes of inappropriate responses to school rules through counseling, academic assistance, and follow-up procedures and finally

3. providing a copy of the in-school alternative philosophy and goals to members of the faculty.

During the writer's quest for appropriate strategies, the concept of "mentoring" was consistently mentioned in the literature. Educational professionals identified mentoring as a successful tactic to counteract not only discipline problems, but a multitude of other problems experienced by troubled youth. Gladstone (1988) described a mentor as a "counselor or guide or a more experienced person who takes a special interest in the development of another person" (p. 5).

The Montgomery County Suspension Project (Hawkins 1989) noted that mentoring made a significant difference in the behaviors of several students participating in its mentor's program. Students revealed, in interviews, that the presence of the mentors reflected that not only did the mentors care but the school cared.

Deblois (1989) also discovered that peer tutoring and mentoring, when administered in a thorough manner, not only enhanced the learning environment but promoted social growth for both the mentor and the mentee. Researchers across the country supported this opinion without hesitation. The process of mentoring enables the at-risk student to establish a bond with someone who is not in the student's eyes an authority figure at school. As mentioned earlier, at-risk students felt alienated from the school prior to being placed at an alternative site. Mentoring, according to psychologists, allowed people to be influenced as a result of relationships with significant others. Freedman (1988) credited psychologists who revealed that the maturation of children can be realized through identification. They acquire personalities and behavior patterns as results of modeling these traits with a significant other.

Mentors must be cognizant of their influential profile and treasure the relationship between themselves and the students. Mentors are in a position to relate with students in a variety of ways teachers and parents cannot. Smink

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(1990) explained that the mentor is viewed by the student as being someone the student can "open up" to. This allows the mentor to be more direct in offering advice and guidance.

Most importantly, the mentor is seen as a role model--someone the student can identify with and strive to pattern himself after. Classroom teachers welcome mentors enthusiastically because it offers an opportunity for certain students to receive individualized instruction.

Evidence shows that there have been positive correlations between mentoring and improved school behavior. Reiser, Petry, and Armitage (1989) co-sponsored projects which revealed positive effects on some very important characteristics. These characteristics included test scores, grades and overall academic performance of disadvantaged elementary and secondary students. The students' motivation and attitude toward education were also enhanced. These mentoring relations also improved the students familiarity with environments other than their own. The writer experienced a sense of accomplishment in noticing the students' self-esteem and self-confidence having markedly improved.

Description of Selected Solution

The writer proposed to institute an alternative program with the use of a mentoring component to decrease external-placement for 15 at-risk students who had been referred to external alternative programs. The writer carried out this

process by having these students housed in a classroom in the work site taking courses taught by faculty members. The following subjects were taught:

a. English (grades 9 through 12)

b. Math (individually prescribed)

c. Social Studies (individually prescribed)

d. Science (individually prescribed)

e. Computers

f. Physical Education

g. Study Hall

All of the subjects listed above were instructed by certified teachers. Study hall allowed the students to be remediated in various subjects. Study hall allowed for students to meet with the writer for individual and group counseling sessions.

The writer secured faculty to teach these courses by impressing upon them the need to implement a program of this nature. This process was done with ease due to the fact that many of these faculty members preferred teaching for one period as opposed to other non-teaching assignments. Additionally, many faculty members were required to assist various departments in the school during their professional assignment period. The writer's in-school alternative project allowed the teachers to work with a small group of students. The small pupil-teacher setting enhanced the overall learning environment for both teachers and students.

Information gleaned from the literature suggested that in-school centers offer individualized instruction for at-risk students, workshops for parents, and counselor support services that would provide strategies that help students who are experiencing difficulties in school (Hawkins, 1988).

A major component of the writer's proposal to decrease external placement was the additional use of implementing a mentor program. The writer contacted former students who were currently attending the local community college to come into the school to spend at least an hour a day with a student in the in-school alternative program. The writer contacted the district office to have the Volunteers for Schools Program schedule a training workshop for the mentors. After the mentors had been trained they were assigned a mentee.

Report of Action Taken

The writer experienced a significant degree of anxiety upon implementing this practicum. The reasons were twofold. The first reason was because this was the first time the writer authored and implemented a practicum of this nature. Secondly, the new principal had a special interest in this project because he was aware of the problem at the beginning of the school year. He wanted to do something immediately, but by his own admission, had no plan of action.

The writer proposed a 12 week calendar to implement the in-school alternative program. The plan centered

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around two operatives. The first dealt with 7 hours of instruction for 15 students housed in one classroom. Only the teachers would be allowed to come in and out of the class to teach their particular subject area. The writer recruited teachers to cover all six subject areas. It was made perfectly clear to the teachers, with the support of administration, that the class sizes would not exceed 15 students. It was also emphasized that any disruptive behavior exhibited in the classroom would be reason for immediate dismissal from the program and external placement would result. The response to participate by the teachers was admirable, to say the least. The writer is convinced that the support by administration played a major part in the receptive nature of the teachers.

The second phase of this program was the inclusion of each mentor meeting with a prescribed student for at least five hours a week. Mentors devised a scheduled that would not be disruptive to the mentee and met in the library. The writer contacted the registrar of the local community college to solicit the mailing addresses of former students to serve as mentors. The writer received such a response from the former students to serve as mentors that 13 additional mentors served as tutors in the regular school classes. A mentee parent letter was mailed to the parents of the 15 students (Appendix D). Mentors provided schedules of their availability and were assigned

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mentees primarily based on this availability. After the pairing process between the mentor and the mentee, a mentee/mentor goal planning sheet was provided to ensure that designated objectives were being addressed (Appendix E).

The writer scheduled 30 minute individual counseling sessions with 3 students per day. Every Wednesday the writer met with the entire class for a group counseling session during the last period of the day. Also on Wednesday evenings the writer was available at the school for parents who were unable to meet for conferences during the school day (Appendix E). The writer mailed permission forms to parents of all students (Appendix F). A mentee commitment form was also provided to assure the mentee adhered to the rules and procedures of the program (Appendix G).

The writer found it necessary to closely monitor the progress and status of each student. Therefore, a weekly progress report was given every Friday to document and record each child's status (Appendix H). Individual counseling sessions centered around the "findings" of the weekly progress report.

The writer made an attempt to schedule the initial introduction of the mentor/mentee relationship at the same time of the individual counseling sessions to help "break the ice." Mentors were invited and encouraged to attend the Wednesday group sessions if their schedules allowed it.

The writer was fortunate to have access to some

very thought provoking videos for Wednesdays' group sessions. The videos emphasized enhancing self-esteem, drop-out prevention, conflict resolution, drug education, and developmental counseling strategies for teenagers. The videos never failed to result in group discussions that allowed for critical input by mentors in attendance.

The writer found it necessary to have a weekly meeting with the mentors. This meeting took place immediately after the last period of the day following the group counseling sessions. Mentors who were not able to meet on Wednesdays were basically given a review of the minutes of the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to offer an opportunity for the mentors to discuss, compare, and contrast their experiences with their mentees with fellow mentors.

A training for Volunteers for Listeners program was scheduled at a neighboring school for people in the community who volunteer to work with children. This training was provided by the writer's school district at a local elementary school. The writer encouraged nine mentors to participate in this valuable workshop that provided useful techniques for individuals who would like to serve as school volunteers.

There were some concerns by faculty that the wrong message was being sent to the students because school personnel were allowing the students to remain in school in spite of the seriousness of the infraction committed by the

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students. The writer made a concerted effort not to influence the decisions exercised by administration to expedite a transfer on any student. As a matter of fact, there were two students the writer probably would have encouraged to transfer had the decision been left up to the writer. These two students had committed infractions that were quite serious.

In the writer's opinion, individual counseling sessions proved to be very productive. The core of the sessions centered around the weekly progress of the student. The writer detected that the mentee appreciated the abundance of attention now being given to him by both a mentor and the writer.

The writer also took this opportunity to phone the parent of the mentee while the mentee was in the office to inform the parent of the mentee's progress. This phone contact was a new experience for the writer as well as the mentee. Too often phone calls from the writer to parents of at-risk students are of a negative nature. The purpose of these phone calls were to inform the parent of the favorable weekly progress reports. When the mentees realized that the writer was calling their homes to give some good news to parents, they were disappointed when no one answered the phone. On one occasion a mentee was so upset that his mother was not at home at the time of the call, he blurted out "Damn she's always home when I'm in trouble!" The following day the

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parent called, according to her, because of his insistence that the writer had good news. Additionally, these phone calls served as weekly parent contact, since only one parent scheduled a conference with the writer on Wednesday evening.

The writer found it necessary to hold detentions for students who committed minor infractions. It was important to send a message to the students early in the program that detentions would be served with the writer within 24 hours or as soon as possible. The only alternatives to detentions were exclusions and to proceed with an external transfer. Students tended to "act out" when the regular teacher was absent and substitutes were provided. The writer made every effort to visit the classroom when substitute teachers were working.

The mentors played a crucial role in assisting the mentees achieve success in the English and mathematics areas. Since the program housed 9th through 12th grades there were various levels of English, mathematics, science, and social studies that teachers had to prepare students for. According to the teachers the mentors were instrumental and very useful in serving as tutors for all subjects. Certain mentors who had adequate mathematics backgrounds were invaluable to the mathematics teacher. Another mentor introduced the class to the career of video and television repair since he worked as an apprentice in electronics. He actually gave the students a "hands on" opportunity to work

on a VCR and explained how it worked.

The writer scheduled three guest speakers to come to the class. Of the three speakers scheduled two were able to come. The first speaker was a former Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) agent who spoke on the importance of discipline and how it affects employment. The second speaker was a columnist for the local newspaper who spoke on the significance of "survival skills" and the importance of dealing with "peer pressure".

The writer had quite a few unexpected guests (teachers) visit the class. The teachers admitted that it was purely out of curiosity because some positive comments had begun to circulate in the teacher's lounge. One teacher commented that she just had to see how so many "notable" students could be in the same class all day without a crisis situation occurring.

Parent involvement was tantamount to the success of the program. Because of the non-traditional nature of the class, it was important to the writer that parents knew why certain programmatic decisions were necessary.

The writer requested that all parents come to the school personally to sign the parent permission form. The personal visits also gave parents an opportunity to ask any questions regarding the rules and procedures of the program. Out of the 15 students referred, 2 of the students' parents were unable to come out to the school during the day or Wednesday

evening hours. The writer began to experience persistent behavior problems with one of the students. It was not until the writer demanded that the parent come to the school that the student admitted that he no longer lived with his parent. When asked who was the adult on the phone the student replied that it was his girlfriend's mother. After further investigation it was revealed that the student had left his own home after an argument with his mother. A conference was held with an administrator in regard to the student's status and the student was allowed to remain in the program. The writer held a conference with the student, his mentor, and seven teachers without a parent. Surprisingly, the "I do not care attitude" vanished. His grade in mathematics even improved. The writer believes that teachers should know as much about the home background of the student as possible. It tends to give a teacher a little more patience and understanding when dealing with non- traditional behavior.

One concern of the writer was being able to conduct the computer class of the program. It was first suggested that the students go to the computer lab during sixth period to share the computers with an existing class. After the first week the students admitted to the writer that they felt uncomfortable because the students in the lab "looked at them funny" when they entered the room. The writer shared this concern with the assistant principal. To the surprise of the writer it was approved by the assistant principal to have

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four computers transferred to the class. The presence of the computers in the classroom was greatly appreciated not only by the students but the teachers as well. The mathematics and English teachers took advantage of the computers and included them in their lesson plans.

The writer must admit that the planning of this practicum was not purposely designed to coincide with the end of the school year. Fortunately it worked out perfectly, especially with the mentoring component. The duration of the practicum actually lasted for 13 weeks A final meeting was held with the mentors if their schedule allowed them to attend. The meeting was conducted basically to express appreciation on behalf of the school and administration. The mentors were strongly encouraged to continue to visit the school and check on the progress of the mentees. Additionally, mentors were asked to maintain communication with the mentee over the summer break.

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CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The number of at-risk students in the writer's worksite needed to be decreased. The writer's worksite was one of three schools in the district that had been identified as having exceeded the average for having placed students in external alternative placement. The student referral report for the 89-90 school year indicated that the writer's school recommended 31 students for external alternative school placement. Every student that was recommended for alternative placement met one or more criteria for an at-risk student.

A 12 week program was implemented to reduce the number of 15 students that had been referred for placement and were waiting for their transfers to be processed. The core of this solution centered around an effort to better address the needs of these at-risk students. The writer's objective was to reduce the number of 15 students to at least 7 students.

The plan of action for this program began with creating a school within a school. Seven teachers were selected by the writer to teach required subjects and study hall. The students were housed in one classroom all day while the teachers transferred in and out of the class. Individual and group counseling were provided by the writer on a regular basis. A weekly progress report was administered by the

writer, with the results of the reports being communicated to the parent by phone during the individual counseling session. The writer provided group counseling sessions on Wednesday and also made available an opportunity for parents to arrange for evening appointments.

The second phase of the solution strategy was the implementation of a mentoring program. This phase of the solution was surprisingly effective. The writer recruited fifteen former students from the local community college to serve as mentors to the target population. The mentors scheduled themselves to come in at least five hours a week to meet with their mentees in the library and sometimes in the classroom. Mentors and mentees were asked to complete a Goal Planning Worksheet. This worksheet included a number of activities that involved having the mentee improve such things as grades, homework, study habits, etc.. Mentors were also asked to participate in the weekly group sessions that mostly entailed personal development counseling strategies.

The first objective for the practicum designated that at the end of 12 weeks there would be a decrease by at least 50% of the number of students placed in an external alternative school site that had been referred by administration. The results of this objective are in Table 1.

Table 1

Data on Mentees in Target Population

Referred for Transfers	Actual Transfers
15	2

This objective was achieved as documented in Table 1. Table 1 indicates that prior to the implementation of the practicum 15 students were recommended for transfer to the region's alternative school site for conduct code violations that could result in administrative placement.

The second objective indicated that there would be an increase in grades of at least 7 of the 15 students in the target population. They did improve by at least a letter grade in English and mathematics. Table 2 illustrates the increase in grades by at least 10 of the targeted population of 15 students.

Table 2

Grade Comparison in English and Mathematics

	Before the Practicum	After the Practicum
Student	Eng - Math	Eng - Math
A.S.	D - F	C - D
F.O.	D - F	D - D
G.L.	F - F	C - C
H.J.	C - D	C - C
W.P.	NC - NC *	C - C
R.T.	F - F	B - C
C.P.	F - D	C - B
L.D.	F - C	C - C
E.P.	D - F	B - C
H.L.	F - NC	C - D
P.L.	NC - D	C - B
H.J.	F - F	D - C
C.M.	D - F	C - B

* NC indicates No credit due to excessive absences.

Table 2 clearly shows an increase in grades in both English and mathematics. The writer also noticed a significant increase in grades in the other subject areas as well.

Discussion

The writer would like to acknowledge that there was a combination of "treatments" being utilized to result in the success of decreasing alternative placement for the target population. One of those treatments was the

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containment of the population. It was quite evident that the students were not pleased about having to stay in one classroom all day and not have an opportunity to socialize with their peers in the regular school population. It was made clear to the students that they would have to behave themselves in the program or eventually be administratively transferred to the external site. Quite frequently students wanted to know if they were "doing okay" in reference to being mainstreamed back into the general population of the school.

On the other hand, there were a few students who were quite pleased to be housed on the school site regardless of being contained. They had been administratively transferred before and preferred being on their own school campus. This concurs with the NSBA (1989) in suggesting that the at-risk students negative perception of school is only worsened due to mandatory assignments to external alternative school sites. The in-school program coordinated by the writer agreed with Patterson (1985) who believed that uniqueness of toughness and love is essential in dealing with some at-risk students.

The mentoring phase of the program was a tremendous success. The writer has a better understanding of Neill (1976) when he reported that some schools become preoccupied with punishment with little or no emphasis on rehabilitative strategies. The mentors were greatly appreciated by

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the teachers. Teachers admitted that the mere presence of the mentors effected the overall classroom discipline. Quite frequently if a mentor was absent or made arrangements to meet with a mentee in the library, the writer would hear from the teacher in regard to at least having a mentor in the room as often as possible. Many teachers commented that misbehavior by mentees was almost non-existent whenever a mentor was in the room. One teacher was so impressed with one particular mentor that she wanted him to discipline a mentee. The mentor fortunately did not, and informed the writer of the incident. As a result, the writer reminded all teachers of the mentor's role in a meeting the following day.

Additionally, the writer, on a few occasions, had to remind administration of the mentor's role and the purpose of the program. There were clear efforts by some administrators to place students in the program who did not meet the program criteria of the target population, specifically truants. The writer's school already has a program that targets students with truancy problems. Mizell (1977) explains in a review of the literature that a very common fault of in-school programs was the clear misuse of various programs. Consequently too many programs intentionally and unintentionally become misdirected and fail to meet the original objectives. It was very important to the writer that the proposed objectives and strategies remained intact. The writer was confident that all of the objectives would

be met as long the program remained on course with its goals.

It was also important to the writer that these at-risk students experience and witness the "treatment facilitators" (i.e. mentors, teachers, program coordinator) that cared enough about them to make a difference in their lives. Schmidt (1989) concurred that educators must emphasize positive and caring relationships through available resources and de-emphasize punishment wherever necessary. This was important to the writer. During group counseling sessions the writer made it quite clear to the students that in no way were their acts being forgotten or that they were not being held accountable. However, they should be aware that this program was an opportunity for them to take a good look at the direction their lives were taking and to take advantage of the program's existence.

The writer was confident that the students' grades would improve. This could be attributed to a number of reasons. Personally, the writer believes that when at-risk children are given the attention and supervision that they have not received at home, only positive results could emanate.

The results of this practicum clearly show that the goals and objectives were met. Being that this was the first time the writer orchestrated a project of this magnitude the writer is satisfied that it was definitely a success. The writer was put into a position of leadership where a significant number of people were affected. Reviewing the

literature proved to be extremely educational and helpful. Admittedly the writer was quite pleased with the results from both objectives. Not only were they successful, but they also proved to be an enriching experience for the writer.

Recommendations

During the course of the practicum and upon its conclusion the writer noted some strategies that might enhance other projects with similar goals. The writer has recently discovered that the in-school program has been proposed to be on the 91-92 school's budget for funding. Consequently the following must serve as recommendations to assure success:

1. Provide for students to be in the program for at least 18 weeks.

2. Require that parents arrange to meet with teachers at least 3 times during the course of the 18 week period.

3. Arrange for periodic conferences with teachers and the students.

4. Have administrators adhere strictly to the criteria and requirements for students who participate in the program.

5. Never allow the classroom population to exceed 15 students.

Dissemination

The popularity of the mentoring component of this practicum made it possible to share the content of this program with the school's Parent Teacher Student Association

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(PTSA) and at the bi-weekly feeder school pattern meeting consisting of 11 schools. The writer has been asked by the neighboring elementary school principal to share and assist in the implementation of a similar program with the elementary school for the 91-92 school year using high school seniors as mentors for that school. A guidance counselor at an inner-city elementary school with a significantly high number of at-risk students has already received permission to implement a similar program and the writer was named as a consultant to assist in its planning.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE PROFILE

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE PROFILE

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APPENDIX B

WEEKLY PROGRESS REPORT

APPENDIX B

WEEKLY PROGRESS REPORT

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Teacher	Subject	Academic	Effort	Conduct	Attendance

Comments: _____

Teacher	Subject	Academic	Effort	Conduct	Attendance

Comments: _____

Teacher	Subject	Academic	Effort	Conduct	Attendance

Comments: _____

Teacher	Subject	Academic	Effort	Conduct	Attendance

Comments: _____

Teacher	Subject	Academic	Effort	Conduct	Attendance

Comments: _____

Teacher	Subject	Academic	Effort	Conduct	Attendance

Comments: _____

Parent's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C

LIST OF VIDEOS

APPENDIX C

LIST OF VIDEOS

Understanding Who You Are - The Personality Video Series

Personal Development Video Series

Self-Esteem Video Series

Values Video Series

APPENDIX D

MENTEE PARENT LETTER

APPENDIX D

MENTEE PARENT LETTER

Dear Parent:

Your child has been selected to participate in the Alternative Placement program at our high school. The goal of this program is to reduce the number of students placed in external programs who have experienced difficulty in the regular school environment.

The program will provide small classroom instruction in all subjects. Additionally the program will include an opportunity to introduce your child to a mature and motivated adult from the local community college who has volunteered to serve as a mentor to your child. The mentor will meet at least 5 hours a week with your child and help him with schoolwork and explore the worlds of school, college, and work.

Another important component of this program will be participation in individual and group counseling sessions with the program coordinator on a weekly basis. The program coordinator will also make himself available every Wednesday evening from 6:00 - 8:00. to meet with parents of participants in the program.

Your participation is crucial to the success of this program. To show your support of the program we ask that you sign the attached Parent Permission Form and Mentee Commitment Form and have your child return them to the school.

A meeting will be held for all parents of students in the program. We strongly encourage you to attend. The time and date of this important meeting will be sent to you.

Thank you for your help and cooperation. We look forward to a very special and successful experience for your child.

Sincerely,

Program Coordinator

APPENDIX E

MENTEE/MENTOR GOAL PLANNING SHEET

APPENDIX E

MENTEE/MENTOR GOAL PLANNING SHEET

I. Goals

A. I will improve my grade in (subject)

B. I will pass (subject)

C. I will pass a test in (subject)

II. Strategies to Accomplish my Goals

A. I will do my homework every night.

B. I will participate meaningfully at least once in each class period

C. I will study seriously before each test.

D. I will make a serious effort to improve my conduct in each class.

III. Strategies to assist the mentee to accomplish goals

A. We will review the subject material before a test.

B. We will review all homework if possible.

C. We will discover the possible usefulness of the subject for future use.

D. We will familiarize ourselves with the school library.

Mentee Signature

Mentor Signature

APPENDIX F

PARENT PERMISSION FORM

APPENDIX F

PAEENT PERMISSION FORM

I give my child,_____ permission to participate in the Alternative Program at school. Specifically, I give permission for my child:

1. to participate fully in classroom instruction for the next twelve weeks, it is understood that my child must remain in the same classroom all day with other participants in the program.

2. to have regularly scheduled one-to one meetings with an approved mentor from who has been designated by the program coordinator and the local community college. These meetings will be at least for an hour a day for the duration of the program.

3. to attend other activities offered by the program which may occur in the evenings.

I understand that this program is to serve as an alternative to external school placement for my child therefore certain rights and privileges may be denied in order to assure the success of this program.

_____

Parent or Guardian Signature

_____

Date

APPENDIX G

MENTEE COMMITMENT FORM

APPENDIX G

MENTEE COMMITMENT FORM

I _____, if chosen to participate in the High School Alternative Program agree to:

1. participate fully in the classroom instruction and do my best to improve my grades and behavior while in the program;

2. meet with my mentor at least 5 hours per week;

3. attend weekly group sessions with the program coordinator;

4. attend special events and activities;

5. adhere to all program rules while enrolled in the Alternative program.

_____
Student Signature

_____
Parent or Guardian Signature

_____
Date

APPENDIX H

WEEKLY PROGRESS REPORT

APPENDIX H

DAILY PROGRESS REPORT

Name_____

Date_____

Subject_____Grade____ Effort____ Conduct_____

Comments:_____

Teacher's Signature _____

Subject_____Grade____ Effort____ Conduct_____

Comments:_____

Teacher's Signature_____

Subject_____Grade____ Effort____ Conduct_____

Comments:_____

Teacher's Signature_____

Subject_____Grade____ Effort____ Conduct_____

Comments:_____

Teacher's Signature_____

Subject_____Grade____ Effort____ Conduct_____

Comments:_____

Teacher's Signature_____

Subject_____Grade____ Effort____ Conduct_____

Comments:_____

Teacher's Signature_____

Subject_____Grade____ Effort____ Conduct_____

Comments:_____

Teacher's Signature_____

APPENDIX I

WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT

APPENDIX I

WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT

Name _____

Date _____

Individual Counseling

Comments: _____

_____

Group Counseling

Comments: _____

_____

Weekly mentor meeting

Comments: _____

_____

Parent Conferences:

Comments: _____

_____